

OBITUARIES

PROFESSOR JOSEF HLADKÝ AS HE WILL BE REMEMBERED*Libuše Dušková*

Among his friends and colleagues Professor Josef Hladký has been known as Joe, but whatever pleasant connotations this English hypocoristic may have, it does not suggest the attributes associated with the Czech diminutive Jozífeček, the form of address used by his Czech associates. This domestic term invokes someone friendly, kindly, cheerful, amiable, who is generally liked. And this is how he will remain in our recollections.

For those outside Brno University personal contacts with Professor Hladký were only occasional, which brought into relief some aspects of his work and activities. A born organizer with a gift to single out events beneficial to the advancement of English studies in this country, he initiated and was the spiritus agens of the Brno conferences of English and American Studies. His part in the successful organization and smooth proceedings of these conferences, at which he moreover appeared as a speaker, will be remembered by all who took part if only once, and even more so by those of us who have attended them more or less regularly. I was also fortunate to meet him at a conference abroad, viz. the IAUPE Conference in Bamberg in 2001. I had not known that he was taking part, and it was a most pleasant surprise to catch sight of him after the opening concert at one of the Bamberg churches. We met not only at the conference events, but also while exploring the Bamberg sights in the free time. One of them is a castle, situated on a hill within walking distance from the town. In the spell of hot weather that held throughout the duration of the conference, the climb to the top of the hill could hardly be called a refreshing stroll. I met Professor Hladký when I walked down while he was nimbly walking up. I also remember his coming to Cikháj during one of the intensive courses held there. He had come specially from Brno for the evening lecture and discussion. I remember that day at Cikháj for two more reasons. It was the only occasion on which I had the opportunity to observe the late Professor Firbas teaching a class. And the date of my visit there was 17 November of 1989.

Professor Hladký's visits to Prague were not very frequent. He mostly came as a member of an academic council or committee, notably of commissions appointed to deal with applications for professorships. As a lecturer, he appeared at the meetings of the Linguistic Association in Prague on the occasion of his anniversaries. One of his lectures was concerned with the Czech and the English names of mushrooms, the topic of a book which was then in preparation. When it appeared in print, it met with wide reception and has since become one of his best-known works. In a later anniversary lecture he gave an account of an editorial project concerning the

publication of Vilém Mathesius' Memoirs. The collection of the documents for the intended volume had involved extensive research and much expenditure of time and energy, regrettably without the satisfaction of seeing the book in print. It is even more to be regretted that now, when at last Mathesius' Memoirs are going to be published in a few months, Professor Hladký can no longer be advised of it.

Of his other books (several of them have been written in connection with the programmes of English studies pursued in Brno) the one that has gained a still wider public than the book on mushrooms is, to my knowledge, his earlier volume on false friends in English. There is hardly a serious English student who has not ever resorted to it.

As regards Professor Hladký's many studies and papers, not being a lexicologist or a historical linguist, I can only present a very partial view of the points which I have witnessed to be recurrently sought and studied in his works. One of these is complex condensation of sentence structure, a phenomenon first noticed by Vilém Mathesius, and further investigated by the late Professor Vachek. Drawing on the work of his renowned predecessors, Professor Hladký wrote several articles which contribute to previous findings by examining hitherto unresearched aspects. His studies continue to be referred to by all later students of the subject. Another point which students of English recurrently look up in his works is word division. Like English punctuation, English word division presents a serious problem to Czech speakers since the principles on which these features of written language are based greatly differ in the two languages. Professor Hladký's studies of word division have filled a long-felt need and provided reliable guidance in this respect.

His editorial activities, already noted in connection with Mathesius' Memoirs, continue a line of work begun by the late Professor Josef Vachek. It was to this scholar that he turned his attention first. In the volume *Josef Vachek in letters and recollections* (1998) he collected reminiscences of Professor Vachek's pupils and followers showing him in a personal light, which is also apparent in the letters included as a second part. In this volume Professor Hladký created a lasting memorial to his great teacher.

The second book which he edited had been intended to celebrate the 80th birthday of the late Professor Jan Firbas, but by ill fate it became a volume in his memory (*Form and Function. To the memory of Jan Firbas*, Amsterdam, 2002). Addressing primarily an international public, it mostly contains contributions by foreign writers, for the collection of which Professor Hladký spared neither time, nor effort.

Even from the little that has been said Professor Hladký might be thought to have aimed high, but he was a very modest man. At the conference held in honour of his seventy-fifth birthday he said after my talk 'So much about so little'. Surely, to do him justice this should be phrased in the reversed order: 'So little about so much.'